

HABS  
OHIO  
18-CLEV,  
35-

Cleveland City Hall  
601 Lakeside Avenue  
Cleveland  
Cuyahoga County  
Ohio

HABS No. OH-428

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

CITY HALL PROJECT DATAHABS  
OH-10,  
18-CLC  
35-NAME: Cleveland City HallLOCATION: Lakeside Avenue at East 6th Street  
(601 Lakeside Ave.)  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114  
Cuyahoga CountyPRESENT OWNER: City of ClevelandPRESENT OCCUPANT: City of ClevelandPRESENT USE: Government Facility

SIGNIFICANCE: The present Cleveland City Hall was the first and only to be built by the City of Cleveland since the City's incorporation in 1836. Prior to its dedication on July 4, 1916, city government offices were housed in a series of two Superior Avenue locations in Cleveland's commercial district. Offices were again rented in 1875 when Cleveland City Hall settled into the Case Block. The Block was purchased from the Case Estate in 1906 and five years later the cornerstone was laid for the present City Hall.

Designated Cleveland's first landmark on December 6, 1972, Cleveland City Hall reflects the vision of early urban planners who guided it to completion as part of the Group Plan, or Mall Plan conceived at the turn of the century. Cleveland-born architect, J. Milton Dyer, incorporated Neo-Classic and Beaux-Arts design with Doric Order in the main lobby to create a simple yet dignified setting for city government.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

- 1) Council Resolution: Ordinance No. 21785, 9/28/11.  
Cornerstone Laying: July 22, 1911  
Dedication Date: July 4, 1916

## B. Architect

J. Milton Dyer (1870-1957), architect for the Cleveland City Hall, moved to Cleveland in 1881 at the age of eleven. His training started in our Central High School where he won a scholarship to Case School of Applied Science. After attending Case he continued for a year in Germany and for five years in Paris, at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, where he was a contemporary of John Russell Pope and Joseph Hunt.

His Cleveland practice, started soon after his return from Europe, met with almost immediate acceptance. In November, 1906, the "Architectural Record" published his success story in a 20-page article, "...the six years he has practiced in that city..."

....he has designed schools, clubs, churches, and of course many private dwellings." The article included: drawings of the Cleveland City Hall and Summit County Court House (Akron); studies of the City Farm Colony and Tuberculosis Hospital (Warren, Ohio).

The next fifteen years produced important buildings that substantiate Dyer's now legendary capacity for work and play: the U.S. Sub-Treasury Building in San Francisco; stores on Euclid Ave. for Sterling & Welch Company and William Taylor Son and Company; the Cleveland Athletic Club office building and club house; the Peerless Automobile Company office building.

All of his works demonstrate an extraordinary range of architectural expression, all touched with a distinction reflecting his capable management of form and detail. At the age of seventy he dedicated his new U.S. Coast Guard Station at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. His great professional talent, vigor, and personal charm brought important contributions to a city bursting with industrial expansion and newly created wealth.

C. Builder, contractor, suppliers

- 1) Construction Engineer: James L. Stuart
- 2) Masonry Supplier: The Woodbury Granite Company
- 3) Source of Stone: New England Area

CITY HALL PROJECT: CLEVELAND

Sections 4 and 5

Cleveland City Hall's outward appearance is relatively unchanged from the day it was dedicated. The only major structural change has been the construction of the underground parking garage behind it. This \$11 million, 1500-space garage was completed in 1975. Prior to its being built, Summit Avenue ran behind City Hall, but this was removed to make way for the garage and an above ground parking lot.

The only other exterior change of note has been the addition of two flagpoles and outdoor illumination in the early 1970's. The Hall was originally built with a single flagpole on the roof facing Lakeside Avenue. The two additional poles were placed on the pedestals which flank the front steps.

The magnificent City Council chamber was redecorated in 1951 at a cost of \$32 thousand. The most artistically awesome sight is the renovated renaissance style ceiling, gilded in 23-carat gold leaf with chandeliers to match. Woodwork was also refinished, and eight new city and state seals in mosaic were placed in the four corners of the room.

The biggest artistic change in the redecoration was the installation of a  $32\frac{1}{2}$  x 18 ft. mural, flanked by two seals of America, on the wall behind the president's rostrum. Painted in 1927 by Ivor Johns, the mural originally hung in the old Central National Bank Building at East 4th Street and Euclid Avenue. The bank not only donated the mural to the city, but

financed its restoration and framing. The mural depicts Cleveland's industrial and professional people, with a background of smoke rising from factories.

Between 1972 and 1973, the mayor's offices were renovated under the direction of then Mayor Ralph J. Perk. The offices were in sad shape, especially the elegant tapestry room, where the mayor greets official guests. In 1972, Peter Paul Dubaniewicz, a professor at the Cleveland Institute of Art, described the furnishings as more suited to a German beer hall. The tapestries, woven in 1916, depict scenes in the city's history. At a cost of approximately \$60 thousand, all solicited privately, Perk had the tapestries cleaned, woodwork refinished, and new lighting, carpeting, and drapes installed.

The only other area to match the magnificent architecture of the mayor's office and City Council chamber is the grand hall where visitors enter from Lakeside Avenue. The entrance occupies the center of the structure and is walled with Botticini marble imported from Italy. The grand hall is 100 feet long and 55 feet wide, rising majestically to the dome.

In contrast, the remainder of City Hall is rather plain by design. A Cleveland Plain Dealer article of 2/10/10 by George Arthur states, "...There will be little or no attempt to beautify it in the way some buildings are adorned...It is to be an office structure almost exclusively so far as the offices are concerned. The rooms in which the city's men will work are to look more like those of a downtown skyscraper than anything else you can think of. This sounds like an attempt to create an atmosphere of work..."

This is Cleveland's third city hall. When the city government was first established, the main offices were in the Commercial Building, 61-65 Superior Street, and council meetings were held in a building on Public Square. It could hardly be said that Cleveland had a city hall under those conditions. In 1855, the building at the southwest corner of Public Square was leased for twenty-five years to serve as a city hall. That building was razed in the late 1920's to make way for the construction of the Terminal Tower.

Then in 1875, the municipal government moved to the new building erected at East 3rd Street and Superior by Leonard Case. Although designed for business purposes, the city leased it for twenty-five years and eventually bought the property. Until the time it purchased the Case Building, Cleveland had the distinction of being one of the few cities which did not own its own governmental building. In 1875, the then mayor wrote that Cleveland at last had a city hall which would be sufficient for its needs for all time. This proved false by 1895 when the city started to erect a new city hall on the two north quadrants of Public Square. The plan was dropped when citizens, wanting to keep the square green, protested.

Optimism about the city of Cleveland was running high when the new city hall was dedicated in 1916. At that time Cleveland was the sixth largest city in the United States. The final sentence in the City Hall dedication program proudly read, "And now there has been dedicated a \$3,000,000 structure of steel and

marble and granite and the optimists who are sure that Cleveland is soon to be the third city of the nation predict that the municipality will outgrow its present home." Neither of those predictions ever took place.

### The Group Plan

The construction of Cleveland City Hall and the Group Plan go hand in hand. The proposed lakefront location for this building was the germ of the idea for the Group, or mall, Plan. After the city bowed to public pressure in 1895 and abandoned plans for a Public Square city hall. In 1898, a commission appointed to recommend a new site called for a lakefront location. One year later, President McKinley permitted the erection of a Public Square Post Office and the mall began to take shape.

The plan finally accepted was that of Daniel H. Burnham, Arnold W. Brunner, and John W. Carrere, who were appointed by Governor Nash in 1902. The idea was to create a grouping of public buildings of similar design, incorporating an open mall that would face Lake Erie.

First to emerge of the Group Plan was the U.S. Post Office and Courthouse, built on the northeast corner of Superior Avenue and Public Square, and dedicated in March of 1911. Just east of the Post Office, the Cleveland Public Library was designed in the French Renaissance style to harmonize with its neighbor. It was constructed in 1925.

To the north of the library is the actual mall. It is highlighted by the Cleveland Memorial Fountain, a 35-foot bronze statue, and the Hanna Fountain reflecting pools, constructed in 1966.

Running alongside the mall on East 6th Street are the Board of Education Building, constructed in 1930, and the Public Auditorium and Music Hall, dedicated in 1922 and 1927, respectively.

At the north end of East 6th Street is Cleveland City Hall, whose location brought about the Mall Plan. To the west of City Hall on Lakeside Avenue is the County Courthouse, a Beaux-Arts style structure opened in 1912. Also considered part of the Group Plan is the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland at East 6th and Superior Avenue. It was erected in 1921-23 in a style known as American Renaissance.

The one building projected by the commission but never built was the Union Terminal, envisioned for the north end of the mall on Lakeside Avenue. Instead, it was located on Public Square in the form of a sub-grade concourse surmounted by the Terminal Tower.

Researched by Bob Becker

August, 1981

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

When construction began on Cleveland City Hall it marked an epoch in a history of expansion from a village of less than 150 people in 1815 to the 6th city in the United States with an estimated population of 735,000.

Cleveland was producing nine automobiles of national repute and was considered foremost in auto parts construction. A 1914 federal census showed that \$.30 of every U.S. dollar invested in automobiles came to Cleveland.

Cleveland was then chosen as the site for the Fourth Federal District and the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland was established. The City had become a financial center for one of the most important industrial, commercial and agricultural centers of the nation and this phenomenal growth rate created the demand for city government expansion. The Case Block structure, which had been rented at a cost of \$36,000 a year for 25 years, could no longer accomodate city government needs.

Cleveland was one of the last large U.S. cities to build its own City Hall, though not because previous efforts had not been made. In 1895 the prospect of a new city hall on Public Square caused controversy between existing Public Square tenants and the City of Cleveland. Cleveland pursued plans to build the city hall and even broke ground on the Public Square location, but the City was served an injunction to halt the process by property owners who wanted to keep their air, sun and open space free of this major construction.

Mayors who have resided in City Hall include;

1916-1920 - Harry L. Davis  
 1920-1921 - William S. Fitzgerald  
 1921-1923 - Fred Kohler  
 1924-1929 - William R. Hopkins City Manager  
 1930-1931 - Daniel E. Morgan  
 1931-1932 - Harold R. Burton Acting Mayor  
 1932-1933 - Ray T. Miller  
 1933-1935 - Harry L. Davis  
 1935-1940 - Harold R. Burton  
 1940-1941 - Edward Blythin  
 1941-1944 - Frank J. Laushe  
 1945-1953 - Thomas A. Burke  
 1953-1962 - Anthony J. Celebrezze  
 1962-1967 - Ralph B. Locher  
 1967-1971 - Carl B. Stokes (First Black Mayor in U.S.)  
 1971-1977 - Ralph J. Perk  
 1977-1979 - Dennis J. Kucinich  
 1979- - George V. Voinovich

Each Mayor has made his own individual contribution to City Hall, from Tom L. Johnson, Herman C. Baehr and Newton D. Baker, the three mayors who never occupied City Hall but spearheaded efforts to build it; to current Mayor George V. Voinovich who has hosted a reception for the Presidential Debate and for the 1981 Baseball All Star game in the Grand Hall (Rotunda). Cleveland Mayors have utilized, enjoyed and improved Cleveland City Hall throughout its years.

City Hall received its most substantial improvements under former mayor Ralph Perk's administration. Layers of dust and grime were removed from the interior to reveal long hidden artistic details. The exterior was sandblasted to its original light grey shade and flagpoles were placed on the plinths that have remained empty since the building's erection.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

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A. Description of the Exterior:

The Cleveland City Hall is a monumental building in a monumental setting. Views of the building fail to capture the commanding position of its placement at the end of a three-block long vista as well as its position in the configuration of the Cleveland Mall.

Both the Mall and the City Hall were products of that era (1900-1915) of civic rebuilding we label as the City Beautiful Movement. The city's central business district then ended at a cliff above the shore of Lake Erie; the rough terrain provided a park called "Lake View" on land purchased by the city in 1867. Ironically it was the construction of the mall that eliminated Lake View Park. A rapidly growing city at the time, Cleveland warranted something grander to mirror its increasing importance.

Furthermore, in the period of 1900-1905, there was the actual or the anticipated construction of several major public buildings. With the effective persuasion of both the local architectural society and the Chamber of Commerce a Group Plan Commission was created, its distinguished members were Daniel H. Burnham, John M. Carrere and Arnold W. Brunner. The Commission conceived of a grand public space enclosed by the city's major public buildings which were to be carried out in an architectural character of substantial unity, based firmly on classical precedence.

The Cleveland City Hall was to share with a new courthouse building, and ultimately, a central railroad station, the northern edges of the Mall. The station was never erected, but the courthouse

and the City Hall became the corner anchors for the monumental area upon their completion in the early 1910's. Both rise with commanding presence above the city's lower waterfront. Both complete striking vistas along major north-south streets.

These vistas terminate at the principal street front and entry ways to the buildings. Since these facades face south, the dramatic play of sunlight upon the buildings, seen from a distance, is especially impressive.

The City Hall bears a cornerstone date of 1911, but was largely under construction from 1912 to 1914, according to photographs taken during its erection. Dyer may have developed the plans as early as 1907 and did so in a concept which closely matched the developing Cuyahoga County Court House, completed in 1912. Dyer's building placed two identical wings either side of a central pavilion which rises higher than the remainder.

The facade screens five floors and basement but does so by rendering the fourth and fifth floors largely unexpressed, the windows of the latter being recessed and covered by a balustrade. The elevated first floor features a rusticated granite surface and round-headed windows. The second and third floors have paired windows set within a colonade of Tuscan order attached columns. The main pavilion has an extended center section fashioned as a two-story porch and provided with free-standing granite columns in a three-bay grouping. At the fifth level Dyer carried the central floor forward as a powerful, unadorned block. Space was provided for sculptured figures which were never realized. Two enormous plinths embrace the main entry steps. These were to bear sculpture forms but were also left empty until fitted out with large-scale bronze flag poles during the 1970's.

The end elevations (west and east) of the City Hall front on park areas and provide important entrances to the basement level of the building via steps down to a large-scaled area-well which continues around the entire structure. The basic architectural bays are repeated with no interruptions via different features. This regular treatment likewise characterizes the north or lake-facing elevation. Here the main pavilion has no entrance doors and is windowed as the wings.

The granite skin of the City Hall derives from quarries presumably in the New England area. It completely surfaces the building, other than copper roofing and bronze used at sash and entry doors. The three main entry doors have an outer and an inner set of paired units. The outer sets are composed of paneled bronze having geometric motifs. Giant-scaled bronze lanterns flank each entry niche. In the 1970's, an installation of anodized aluminum lighting fixtures occurred across all the facades. These have provided the building with a dramatic night-time illumination not initially contemplated.

As the City Hall sits relatively near to the sidewalk, a narrow lawn and a single row of trees slightly soften the bulk of the building. At the ends the public spaces offer a larger foil of trees which shroud the structure's mass. At the lake front the city's parking garage (built in the mid 1970's) has come to serve as a massive base of windowless limestone walls for the far more articulated hall above.

## B. Description of the Interior;

The ordered and crisp symmetry of the exterior of the Cleveland City Hall is also present inside. The building's imposing formality persists throughout the interior beginning with the large entry vestibule which, via a flight of steps, leads to the Great Hall, sometimes referred to as the Rotunda. This barrel vaulted, sky lit space is surrounded by marble doric columns two stories high, and forms the very center of the building. Flanking the Great Hall on the main floor are two large public rooms that had originally been sky lighted. These rooms are at the bases of white tiled light courts that run the full height of the building. The floors and much of the walls of these important spaces are of polished and carved marble set off with cast plaster moldings and punctuated with bronze lamps and gates.

The reserved but important quality of this palace of government continues on the second floor with its high ceilings and elegant dark stained oak doorways and transoms. This floor's long tall corridors are relieved by windows into the flanking light courts on one side and by cast bronze balcony railings on the other looking down into the Great Hall between the fluted doric columns.

Most of the major public spaces are on the ground floor while the offices of the Mayor and his staff are on the second floor along with the offices of City Council. The municipal courts were on the third floor, but offices will soon use that space; the fourth floor or mezzanine floor is used mainly for storage and mechanical equipment; and the fifth floor is all offices. Of these upper floors the second has the highest ceilings and is more richly decorated with painted plaster moldings and an elegant Mayor's suite.

A unifying feature of this building is its apparent predictability, and there is really nothing on the exterior to suggest the presence of a major space on the second floor. If it were not for a few handsomely hand lettered signs the Council Chamber might be entered without warning; but the bank of high oak doors with flanking tuscan columns hint of a surprise. This remarkably grand room is a two story auditorium that is almost cubic in its spatial feeling. Its floors are carpeted, the walls are decorated with paneled and carved oak with intricately molded and decorated plaster; and the ceilings have deep gilded coffers with rosettes in their centers. Large elaborate chandeliers hang from six of these rosettes and other lighting is provided by bronze sconces placed high on the oak paneling.

The oak desks of the Council members are arrayed concentrically from the speaker's rostrum at the center of the dais which is against one of the long walls. The opposite wall has high windows that face Lake Erie while the short walls have balconies that can be reached from the third floor.

The City Council Chamber and the Mayor's Office are the richest rooms in City Hall and are on a par with other elegant public spaces of the Beaux Arts period anywhere in the world.

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